

Ro 1:18–23 (ESV) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ⁽¹⁹⁾ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ⁽²⁰⁾ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ⁽²¹⁾ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ⁽²²⁾ Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ⁽²³⁾ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

1. Recap: What we've seen in this passage so far

- A. We've seen God is not a detached spectator in his creation when man sins – he is angry
 - 1). He expresses that righteous anger in wrath – perfectly proportioned to the offense
- B. What is stirring up this divine wrath is mankind's suppression of truth that God has made clear to them
 - 1). Truth God made clear in two ways to every person
 - a). The *external* witness of creation – *internal* witness of conscience
 - 2). God says this is enough information to hold every person accountable
 - a). If they reject him they will stand before him without excuse
 - b). they will be judged and that judgment is fair
- C. If they respond appropriately – seeing there is a creator – and desiring to know him
 - 1). God will do what is necessary to draw them to himself through Christ
 - 2). He will send someone to tell them – or he will reach them in other ways – dreams etc.
 - a). Unreached Island off Coast of Russia – missionaries went to them
“We already know about him” – God has revealed himself to them in a dream
 - b). God is moving powerfully in the Muslim world – using dreams

Transition: So God has made sure mankind knows he exists – but man suppresses it

- A. That rejection of truth starts downward slide as seen in v. 21

I. MAN'S REJECTION OF GOD

Ro 1:21 (ESV) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

1. How did they know God?

- A. Didn't know him personally – but knew there was a God – a creator - that was made plain to them
 - 1). But deliberately chose to suppress that truth – not letting it affect them

Transition: So they take the next step downward

- A. They reject the truth that there is a God – *that leads to a rejection of God himself*
 - 1). Paul shows us two ways this rejection is seen

Mankind's Twofold Rejection of God

1. Man refuses to honor God as God

Ro 1:21 (ESV) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God...

Rom 1:21 (NKJV) ... *they did not glorify Him as God...*

- A. This is the natural downward progression
 - 1). Reject God's truth and you will naturally refuse to glorify him as God

Question: What does it mean to glorify God as God?

- A. It means to acknowledge his greatness and respond accordingly
 - 1). If it's true that he created all we see in nature – then he is amazing – powerful - brilliant

- B. When we look at creation it testifies of his glory

Ps 19:1 (ESV) The heavens *declare the glory of God...*

Ps 104:24–25 (ESV) O LORD, how manifold are your works! *In wisdom have you made them all*; the earth is full of your creatures. ⁽²⁵⁾ Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great.

Is 40:26 (ESV) Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; *by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power*, not one is missing.

Ps 8:1, 3-4 (ESV) O LORD, our Lord, *how majestic is your name in all the earth!* You have set your glory above the heavens.... ⁽³⁾ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁽⁴⁾ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Question: What he has made declares his glory – what is the glory of God?

- A. It is the sum of all his attributes – all that he has revealed himself to be

- 1). Creation shouts out his immensity – power – wisdom - brilliance

Ro 1:20 (ESV) For his *invisible attributes*, namely, his *eternal power* and *divine nature*, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, *in the things that have been made*.

- B. Then that internal witness of the conscience backs that up – YES all that’s true!

Ec 3:11 (ESV) He has put eternity into man’s heart. . .

- 1). We are created with a spiritual thirst – with a yearning for God

- 2). Creation proves he exists – my heart longs to know him

- a). Why no kids are born as Atheist – they must learn to suppress this yearning

- C. All this should be enough to cause us to acknowledge him – respect him – cry out for him

- 1). Listen to what the angels tell the people in Revelation

Re 14:7 (ESV) And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and *give him glory*, because the hour of his judgment has come, and *worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.*”

- a). Those in heaven see his works and have the sense to let that move their hearts

Question: But what happens when we refuse to recognize what creation is saying about his glory?

When we choose to refuse to respond to the testimony of creation and conscience

A brief history lesson about the glory of God in Israel – just going to use 5 passages – a warning!

- A. We’ll start in Ex. 33: Moses asked to see the glory of God – that request is granted

- 1). God places him in the cleft of the rock – covers his eyes until he is passed

- a). Because no one can see the face of God in their natural state and live

- b). He saw the after glory of God – came down from the mountain with face glowing

- B. Ex. 40: Lord filled the Tabernacle with his glory – sign of his presence with the people

- C. As Children of Israel moved through wilderness saw God’s glory for 40 years

- 1). The pillar of cloud that led them by day – pillar of fire that reassured them at night

- D. 1 Kings 8: After Temple was built by Solomon – Lord’s glory filled Holy of Holies

Point: Israel saw the majesty and glory of God again and again but continued to rebel

- A. They refused to acknowledge his greatness – to honor him through obedience

- B. Finally in Ezekiel 11 their refusal to honor God had a heartbreaking result

- 1). God’s glory departed from the Temple and then from Jerusalem altogether

- 2). Wasn’t quick – they watched that glory depart in steps

- a). It moved out from the Holy of holies – to the threshold in the temple

Then from the threshold to the Eastern Gate of the city

Finally from the city to the mountain on the East side of the city (the Mount of Olives)

George Williams comments: It (the glory of God) retired unwillingly. Thus did the God of Israel in lingering love forsake His city and temple...

- C. Why bring this up? Because it is a picture of what we will see in Romans 1
- 1). When a nation refuses to acknowledge God's truth and refuses to honor God for who he is
 - a). After many warnings – God lingering in love over those people
Eventually in a judicial act he will abandon that people turning them over to themselves

Question: Where is God's glory most vividly seen today? In the person of Jesus Christ

Jn 1:14 (ESV) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- A. Jesus came and displayed God's glory – we see that on the pages of Scripture
- B. Today we honor and glorify God by believing the truth about his Son
 - 1). By acknowledging our need to be saved and trusting in his finished work
 - 2). By bringing him glory by responding to him in obedience

Transition: So far we see the downward descent of mankind in two ways

- A. They reject the truth of God which leads to rejection of God himself
- B. That leads naturally to the third step downward – ingratitude

2. Man refuses to give thanks to God

Ro 1:21 (ESV) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God *or give thanks to him...*

- A. They've rejected the truth about God – therefore they reject the God that truth is speaking about
 - 1). Now they express their *contempt* of him through *ingratitude*
- B. But why should every man, woman, and child be grateful? Because God provides for them

Mt 5:45 (ESV) He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

- 1). He provides those things necessary for life for all who dwell on earth
- C. In Lystra – God used Paul and Barnabas to heal a crippled man

The people saw it and thought Paul and Barnabas were gods – wanted to sacrifice to them

Paul's response: Ac 14:15–17 (ESV) “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ⁽¹⁶⁾ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ⁽¹⁷⁾ *Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*”

- 1). Paul says God has left a witness of himself to all of mankind – loving provision
 - a). It is seen in his provision of rains that produce fruitful seasons
That satisfy your hearts with food and gladness
 - b). Common grace – God provided those things that made life enjoyable
- 2). Why would God do this for people who reject him? His love gives!

Jn 3:16 (ESV) “For God so *loved* the world, (those who didn't deserve it) that he *gave his only Son*, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Transition: Man rejects God's truth then rejects God himself – refusing to honor him and thank him for his goodness in their life

- A. Paul now shows us the two natural effects this rejection of God causes in mankind

The Darkening Effect of Rejecting God (two effects)

1. They become futile in their thinking

Ro 1:21 (ESV) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but *they became futile in their thinking...*

- A. God gave us minds with the capacity to think, imagine, ponder, reason
- 1). Why? One reason is we might use them to know God – ponder God – see how amazing he is
 - 2). But when we reject God and his truth our thinking becomes *futile*
- B. **Futile defined:** Vain, empty, useless
- 1). Paul says when we don't acknowledge God our thinking – reasoning becomes useless
- Thought:** You may be the most brilliant professor in one of our universities
- A. But if you eliminate God from your reasoning your thinking becomes vain and empty
- 1). You may be able to explain the most complex mathematical equation – nuclear fusion
 - a). But what really matters – the art of living correctly now
And the preparation for your eternal future later
 - b). Your reasoning is vain – empty – useless nonsense

Rom 1:21 (HCSB) For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. *Instead, their thinking became nonsense...*
- B. It's amazing what those who reject God come up with spiritually – I've heard the most insane things
- 1). But if you reject the source of spiritual truth what should we expect – man gropes blindly
- Rom 1:21 (AMP)** Because when they knew *and* recognized Him as God, they did not honor *and* glorify Him as God or give Him thanks. But instead they became futile *and* godless in their thinking [*with vain imaginings, foolish reasoning, and stupid speculations*]
- a). Heartbreaking – man clings to these vain imaginations – and bets their eternity on them

Transition: In the next result Paul deepens this idea – of what rejecting truth naturally causes

2. Their foolish hearts (minds) are darkened

Ro 1:21 (ESV) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, *and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

- A. Heart is everything that makes up a man – mind – will - emotions

Ro 1:21 (NLT) ... As a result, *their minds became dark and confused.*

Question: Why is the Heart darkened when people exchange God and his truth for other things?

- A. Because the only way our heart can have spiritual light is through God and his truth

- 1). We are talking about that light that leads to real life – and eternal life

John MacArthur: The mind devoid of God's truth has no way to discriminate between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong, between the significant and the trivial, between the truly beautiful and the monstrous, or between the ephemeral and the eternal.

- B. The person who rejects God cannot understand spiritual things

- 1). God's thoughts and ways are far beyond our natural ability to grasp

Is 55:8-9 (ESV) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁽⁹⁾ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- 2). That is why Paul prays for God to light up our understanding

Eph 1:18 (ESV) having the eyes of your hearts enlightened...

Transition: But notice how mankind rationalizes this rejection of God

- A. How they convince themselves their rejection of God is appropriate

II. MAN'S RATIONALIZATION OF THEIR ACTIONS

Ro 1:22 (ESV) Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

1. To justify these actions man will rationalize their sin

- A. They claim that they are being wise – enlightened

They have cast off the ancient thinking with its religious myths and superstitions

- 1). Rather than having to trust in God they trust in man
In man's ability to reason without any need of divine help
- 2). As Nietzsche famously proclaimed – “God is dead” – man no longer needs to consider him

Thought: So man in his rejection of God think they are being wise – enlightened

A. They pat each other on the back – clever fellow

2. God's opinion (Only one that counts) “you have become a fool”

A. You have rejected the creator of life – the one who wants to give you abundant life

- 1). Not only eternal life beyond the grave – but a quality of life now
 - a). A life of rest – peace – joy – contentment and satisfaction
 - b). A life where God says I am responsible to take care of you my child
 - 1a). You need not be anxious about anything as you live your life out
 - 2a). And it is all leading to an eternity that is beyond your wildest imaginations

B. When you trade what God has promised to give you – for what you can attain on your own

- 1). God says that is the height of foolishness
- 2). *The word for fool is what we get our word MORON from*
 - a). Heaven's evaluation – reject the giver of life and his truth is moronic
- 3). With this in mind let's look again at a quote we had last week – see if you agree

George Wald – American scientist and 1967 Nobel Prize winner

"When it comes to the origin of life, we have only two possibilities as to how life arose. One is spontaneous generation arising to evolution; the other is a supernatural creative act of God. There is no third possibility...Spontaneous generation was scientifically disproved one hundred years ago by Louis Pasteur, Spellanzani, Reddy and others. That leads us scientifically to only one possible conclusion -- that life arose as a supernatural creative act of God...I will not accept that philosophically because I do not want to believe in God. *Therefore, I choose to believe in that which I know is scientifically impossible, spontaneous generation arising to evolution.*

- a). He claims to be wise – but that decision that will affect his eternity is moronic

Transition: Verse 23 shows how foolish man can become – lousiest exchange ever

A. History is filled with famous bad deals but they can't compare to what sinful man does in v. 23

III. THE FOOLISH EXCHANGE

Ro 1:23 (ESV) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

1. This verse proves how religious man is

- A. Men may not be naturally godly but they are naturally religious
 - 1). We are created to be worshippers – if we reject God we will replace him with something else
- B. The thought of something greater has been indelibly imprinted on the heart of man
 - 1). The fall didn't erase that – man must worship something

Theodore Christlieb: The soul has a never-ending sigh after God.

C. Therefore when the sinner rejects the true God they will find another – or make one up

Geoffrey B. Wilson: Man in his rebellion against his Creator remains incurably religious, and he seeks to satisfy this instinct by making his own deities. He much prefers these lifeless puppets to the one true living God, because they allow him to pull the strings.

- 1). Religion provides a phony easing of the conscience – I'm fine – I worship
 - a). But in reality all it's done is pushed God away – to allow you to remain in control
 - b). Worshipping a god who demands nothing – no repentance or obedience

Transition: Here we see how moronic this exchange gets

2. Substitute gods

- A. This is foolish because of what you trade away and what you get
 - 1). Trade God and all his promised blessings for something that can only end in eternal emptiness
- B. The first substitute is images **“resembling mortal man”**
 - 1). **Begins with us** – we worship ourselves
 - a). We are concerned with only our will – our wants and desires – we are Lord of our life
 - 2). Then it moves out to others – the worship of celebrity
 - a). **Celebrity worship syndrome:** is an obsessive addictive disorder in which a person becomes **overly involved** with the details of a **celebrity's** personal and professional life.
 - 1a). People want to live like those who they idolize – dress like them – talk like them
 - b). Recently heard somebody say - “I worship lady Ga-Ga” that was his god
 - 1a). My advice - aim higher than that – but that’s not rare – a recognized syndrome
 - 3). But it doesn’t necessarily have to be a person it can be a thing
 - a). Paul writes about “birds and animals and creeping things.”
 - 1a). You still see this in primitive cultures

Point: Isn’t what the god is – it’s the fact that man chooses inferior gods over the true God

- A. Whether that is yourself – other individuals – statues of animals
 - 1). It may be something inanimate - cars, houses, money, pleasure, career **Is 55:8–9 (ESV)** ⁽⁸⁾ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁽⁹⁾ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
Ge 2:24 (ESV) ⁽²⁴⁾ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

- B. Your god is anything you place above the true God in your affections and devotion
 - 1). You never get equal value in this trade – the value you get back is so bad – God calls it **“moronic”**
 - 2). You are exchanging a relationship with the giver of life and light
 - For darkness and a god who cannot meet your needs here
 - a). And a god who has nothing to offer on the other side of the grave = **foolish, moronic**
- C. I want to close with the words of Spurgeon – that shows what we trade away when we reject God

In heaven the glorified do not weep, for *all outward causes of grief are gone*. There are no broken friendships, nor unfulfilled longings in heaven. Poverty, famine, danger, persecution, and slander are unknown there. There will be no pain to distress us, no anxious thoughts of death or bereavement to sadden. Those there do not weep, for *they are perfectly sanctified*. No evil heart of unbelief prompts them to depart from the living God; they are faultless before His throne and fully conformed to His image. Well might they stop mourning since they have stopped sinning. They do not weep, because *all fear of change is past*. They know that they are eternally secure. Sin is shut out, and they are shut in. They are safe in a city that will never be taken; they bask in a sun that shall never set; they drink of a river that will never run dry; they pluck fruit from a tree that will never wither. Countless cycles may revolve, but eternity will not be exhausted; and while eternity endures, their immortality and blessedness shall endure with it. They are forever with the Lord. They do not weep because *every desire is fulfilled*. They cannot wish for anything that they do not have. Eye and ear, heart and hand, judgment, imagination, hope, desire and will—all the faculties are completely satisfied; and although our present ideas of what God has prepared for those who love him are imperfect, still we know by the revelation of the Spirit that the saints above are supremely blessed. The joy of Christ, which is an infinite fullness of delight, is in them. They bathe themselves in the bottomless, shoreless sea of infinite blessing. That same joyful rest awaits us. It may not be too long before the weeping willow is exchanged for the palm-branch of victory, and sorrow’s tears will be transformed into the pearls of everlasting bliss. “Therefore encourage one other with these words.”

- 1). I want to encourage you that God alone gives true life
 - a). To reject him and his truth is to invite ruin and destruction into you future
 - b). But he has so much for you here and the only one that offers true life later